Pa. Reporter Convicted of Wiretapping

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PHILADELPHIA, Sept. 19 —Greg Walter, an investigative reporter for the Evening Bulletin, was convicted of wiretapping today under a little-known state law and fined $300 and $50 costs in a Municipal Court non-jury trial.

The district attorney's office accused Walter, 38, in May of recording his own phone conversations with four persons without their consent while he was investigating alleged police corruption.

At the time, Walter was in touch with two agents of the State Crime Commission under Attorney General J. Shane Creamer, a Democrat who has been in a running feud with Philadelphia District Attorney Arlen Specter, a Republican who heads the Nixon campaign here and is expected to run for governor in 1974. Specter assigned the misdemeanor case to his top prosecutor, Richard Sprague, who earlier this year won convictions in slaying of defeated United Mine Workers candidate Joseph Yablonski and his family.

In closing arguments today, defense attorney Gregory Harvey said it was "the first time that this particular offense has been prosecuted in this Commonwealth or anywhere else as far as we can determine."

But Sprague, asserting that the press was not immune from prosecution, asked Judge Michael Conroy to impose a jail term of between 15 days and one year.

After the verdict, the Bulletin said it was granting Walter's request for a leave of absence to appeal and "clear his name." He formerly worked for the magazines Life and Philadelphia.

The court upheld Sprague's objections when the defense tried to call witnesses to show that incoming complaint calls to the police and fire departments here are routinely recorded without consent despite the state law. Walter presented only character witnesses in his defense.